



Data available to the regional MCZ project stakeholder groups to develop Marine Conservation Zone recommendations

September 2010

Natural England and JNCC

Purpose:

Natural England and JNCC acknowledge concern amongst regional stakeholder groups about the use of 'best available evidence' in the MCZ recommendation process. Specific concerns relate to the quality of ecological, physical and socio-economic data, the provision and timing of data input into the MCZ designation process, and guidance they are being presented with to develop MCZ site recommendations and impact assessments.

This paper is designed to address these concerns. It will:

1. outline Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) advice regarding the use, as required by UK Government, of 'best available evidence' in the development of MCZ recommendations;
2. clarify how data are being collected and collated for use by the regional stakeholder groups;
3. clarify the data that will be provided to regional stakeholder groups and associated timelines;
4. clarify additional guidance that will be provided to further understand possible implications of MCZ designation on social and economic activities.

This paper will introduce detail on the use of evidence for the designation and management of MCZs. A further paper will be produced to provide more detail about these stages of the MCZ process.

Expectations regarding the use of 'best available evidence' to June 2011

The Government policy position regarding the levels of evidence required for MCZ identification and designation is, *'to fulfil our commitment to creating a network, we will need to take decisions based on the best available evidence, both when designating sites and when deciding how best to regulate activities within them. We accept that decisions will rely on expert opinion in some cases and that this will not satisfy all stakeholders.'*

In addition, Defra recognise that best available evidence will have to include modelled data. Therefore the regional stakeholder groups should not be reluctant to identify MCZs because of a lack of information verifying the existence or condition of a habitat or species.

The [Ecological Network Guidance](#)¹ provides further information regarding the use of best available evidence to identify sites and associated conservation objectives (see section 4.8). It identifies three overarching guidelines:

- MCZ identification and designation should be based on the best available scientific evidence.
- Lack of full scientific certainty should not be a reason for delaying network design and planning, including decisions on site identification.
- MCZ identification should take account of local and lay knowledge.

In applying these guidelines regional stakeholder groups should use the available evidence to make decisions rather than waiting for new, and potentially improved, information. It is recognised that the regional MCZ projects may gather data which stakeholder groups conclude provides best available evidence. In cases where the stakeholder groups believe that evidence is contradictory, they should state which evidence they have chosen to use to inform site selection.

Due to practicalities of data processing and the requirement of the regional MCZ projects to refine MCZ site recommendations between November 2010 and June 2011, it will be difficult to accept any new ecological and physical data that require substantial processing and interpretation into a form suitable for the stakeholder meetings after October 2010. However, if significant new evidence on the distribution of habitats or species, particularly the FOCI, becomes available, the MCZ Project will endeavour to incorporate such material into the stakeholder discussions. Socio-economic data will continue to be collected by the regional MCZ project teams after October 2010 to inform the impact assessment as site boundaries and conservation objectives are refined. Data use is illustrated in Figure 1.

Who is responsible for providing evidence?

The provision of best available evidence to inform the MCZ process is the responsibility of all those involved in the MCZ Project, including sea users and groups who have an interest in the marine environment. Everyone involved in the MCZ process is expected to make relevant information available to support the different stages. Such a premise underpins the stakeholder-led approach being taken.

Best available information will include scientific (ecological & physical) and socio-economic information from many different sources, which may be held nationally or locally by conservation organisations, marine industries, or individuals. In addition, local and lay knowledge can be incorporated through the regional MCZ projects and their stakeholder groups. For their part, Defra, JNCC, and Natural England have commissioned a range of research to collate and develop (where required) ecological and socio-economic information about the marine environment at a national scale to help ensure that the best available evidence is used by the regional MCZ projects. The regional MCZ project teams have been collating relevant information at a regional level that is normally a higher resolution or more detailed scale to complement the national data layers. Stakeholder data would normally fall into the regional-level collections.

A number of processes have been established to collect and collate best available evidence. These responsibilities are shared between Defra, JNCC, Natural England, the regional MCZ projects and stakeholders.

¹ <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/marineconservationzones>

Defra:

- Several research contracts have been established to develop and collate UK wide information for the marine environment, including ecological, physical and socio-economic evidence.

Natural England and JNCC:

- Have provided detail on those species and habitats that are protected by European Marine Sites (Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas), Ramsar sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

JNCC:

- Have provided information regarding the distribution of broad-scale habitats through delivery of the UKSeaMap 2010, the library of detailed habitat maps collected by the MESH Project, the Marine Recorder database containing detailed information on the distribution of habitats and species and are also responsible for providing supplementary detail on the activities of national and international sea users in the MCZ Project area.
- Are taking forward a series of contracts to collate additional national, regional datasets, not captured under the Defra contracts, to improve the quality of data use for the identification of MCZs.

Regional MCZ project teams:

- Will work with national, regional and local stakeholders to access evidence that has not been provided through other sources. In particular this includes local and regional information on the distribution of human activities, which is being gathered by both the liaison officers in the regional MCZ project teams and through the [MCZ Project Interactive Mapping Tool](#)².

Regional stakeholder groups:

- Where stakeholders believe that they have further evidence than that made available through other mechanisms set out above they are being strongly encouraged to share it with the regional MCZ project teams.

What evidence is available to the regional stakeholder groups?

The regional MCZ project teams are responsible for developing a regional profile in which all available ecological, social and economic spatial data will be presented to the regional stakeholder groups.

Annex 1 of this document provides further detail about the spatial data being delivered through the national data contracts, the tools being made available and supplementary guidance to be delivered by Natural England and JNCC.

The aim of the national data contracts is to provide a common, but not the sole evidence base. In cases where stakeholders can provide additional or more up-to-date data (scientific and socio-economic) the regional MCZ project teams will endeavour to incorporate it into the regional profile to ensure recommendations are based on best available evidence. Some of the information drawn to the MCZ Project's attention is currently being mobilised by JNCC as part of site verification work.

Expectations regarding the use of best available evidence beyond June 2011

In order to ensure that MCZs are designated based on the best evidence available at the time JNCC and Natural England will make considerable efforts to ensure relevant new data which become available after June 2011 is considered.

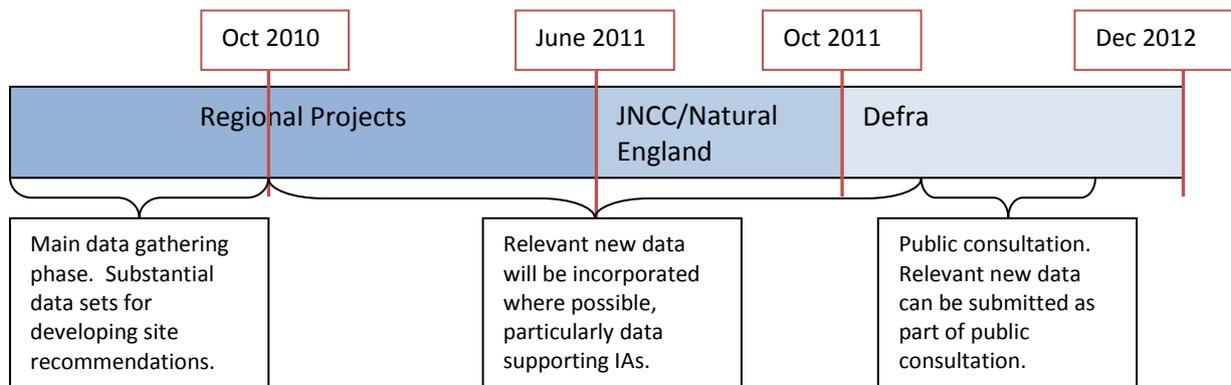
² <http://www.mczmapping.org>

Many organisations including Defra, Public Bodies (including SNCBs, Cefas, Environment Agency), industry and the research community undertake a range of studies to better understand the marine environment as part of their normal business. Such work will continue to build the evidence base and add confidence to the site recommendations, conservation objectives and Impact Assessment submitted by the regional stakeholder groups to inform decisions regarding the designation and management of MCZs. There will also be an opportunity to ‘advertise’ for new information during the public consultation on proposed MCZs, mostly likely to take place in early 2012.

It should also be recognised that MCZ designation and management decisions will not be irrevocable. Decisions on site selection and conservation objectives will be subject to periodic review in light of new evidence – and while we do not anticipate rapid or wholesale changes, some changes may well be required over the coming years. Decisions on management measures will, however, be subject to much more regular review, to reflect our growing knowledge and understanding of the relationships between the marine environment and human activities.

JNCC & Natural England are developing advice on their expectations for the evidence that should be used in the designation and management of MCZs. A paper entitled ‘Levels of evidence required in the selection and management of MCZs’³ is being drafted and will be published once agreed by Natural England and JNCC. Whilst the SNCBs can offer such advice, it remains the responsibility of Defra and the Minister to determine what evidence they require to make decisions on site designation, and for the Regulatory Authorities to reach similar decision on the evidence required for management action.

Figure 1: Stages in use of best available evidence to underpin MCZ designation.



³ Details plus hyperlink to be inserted when published

Annex 1:

Table 1: Contracts to secure data to support MCZ identification, designation and management

Contract	Task	Status: September 2010	Next Steps	Delivered to Regional MCZ Projects/Date to be delivered
MB0102: Accessing and developing the required biophysical datasets and data layers for Marine Protected Areas network planning and wider marine spatial planning purposes	1A - Biotope tagging of benthic sample datasets (Phase 1)	Completed	No further action	Delivered
	1A - Biotope tagging of benthic sample datasets (Phase 2)	Completed for waters adjacent to England.	Northern Ireland data to be included but won't be available until after October deadline	Relevant data delivered
	1B - Translation of habitat maps (Phase 1)	Completed	No further action	Delivered
	1B - Translation of habitat maps (Phase 2)	Completed	No further action	Delivered
	1C - Assessing the confidence of broadscale classification maps	Completed	No further action	Delivered
	2A - Geological and Geomorphological Features	Completed.	No further action	Delivered
	2B - Species data	Completed	No further action	Delivered
	2C - Habitats data	Completed	No further action	Delivered
	2D - Non native species	Completed	No further action	Delivered
	2E - Models of seabed energy caused by tidal currents and waves (originally "fetch and	To undergo peer-review. Layers used to derive broadscale habitats in UKSeaMap 2010.	Waiting for reviewers' evaluation of report.	Data delivered. Report due end of September 2010

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	wave exposure")			
	2F - Marine Biodiversity	Pelagic biodiversity – completed. Benthic biodiversity - in progress	Work in progress for benthic biodiversity including both species and habitats.	Pelagic biodiversity - delivered. Benthic biodiversity - on target to deliver October 2010
	2H - Benthic Productivity	Completed	No further action	Delivered
	2G - Residual current flow	Completed	No further action	Delivered
	2I - Intertidal data layer	Completed	Report downloaded to Defra website 24 th August 2010	Delivered
	3A - Assessing sensitivity of features to pressures	Completed	Final Report to be uploaded to Defra website	Delivered
	4 - Review of existing webGIS platforms	Completed	Further functionality to be developed to enhance webGIS. Final report to be delivered September 2010	Core webGIS delivered, further functionality to be available by October 2010.
MB5301	Nursery and Spawning Grounds	Being updated following peer review.	Final report due 27 th September.	Data delivered.

Contract	Task	Status: September 2010	Next Steps	Delivered to Regional MCZ Projects/Date to be delivered
MB5401: MCZ Project Reporting Tool	Development of MPA Reporting tool and Gap Analysis tool	Draft versions of the MPA Reporting tool and the Gap Analysis tool provided to the regional MCZ projects	Additional work approved to increase functionality.	Draft versions delivered. Final versions due September 2010
MB0103: Developing the necessary data layers for MCZ selection – distribution of rock/hard substrata	Rock data layers	Complete for MCZ Project area	No further action	MCZ Project area data – delivered
MB0105: Deep Sea Habitats – Contributing Towards Completion of the Deep Sea Habitat Classification Scheme	Mapping the distribution of broad-scale habitats in the deep-sea	Completed	No further action	Delivered
MB0106: Further development of marine pressure data layers and ensuring the socio-economic data and data layers are developed for use in the planning of marine protected area networks	Human activities	Complete	Contract variation to allow separation of non-UK and UK VMS	Delivered Variation work to be delivered September
	Pressures	Complete	No further action	Delivered
	Inshore Fisheries Component	Complete	No further action	Delivered

Contract	Task	Status: September 2010	Next Steps	Delivered to Regional MCZ Projects/Date to be delivered
UKSeaMap 2010 modelled seabed habitats and confidence map	Development of broad-scale habitat map and associated confidence map	Complete	UKSeaMap 2010 final report expected October 2010.	Data layers completed. Final report expected October 2010.
MESH survey habitat maps & confidence assessment scores	Update these maps with outputs of MB102 Task 1B & 1C	Available from MESH website, last major update March 2010.		Available to MCZ Projects from outset
Combined modelled & survey habitat maps	Merge of MESH detailed habitat maps with the UKSeaMap 2010 modelled seabed habitats	Provided to Regional MCZ Projects, but some overlaps found in the layer (Berwickshire & offshore Northern Ireland) which are now being corrected.		
Marine Recorder database	Detailed point sample data on distribution of habitats & species. Relevant data on FOCI were extracted by MP102	Updated with 2009 data in July 2010	Data could be extracted to show point data on habitats to support mapped data.	Been available to Regional Projects from the outset

Table 2: MCZ Project data tools and supplementary guidance to be delivery by Natural England and JNCC.

Reference	Tool / Guidance	September 2010 update	Next steps	Delivered to the regional projects/date to be delivered
1	MCZ Project Ecological Network Guidance	Complete	Will review if Government policy changes	Delivered
2	MCZ Project Delivery Guidance	Complete	Will review if Government policy changes	Delivered
3	Additional guidance for regional MCZ projects on planning for areas where licensed, planned or existing socio-economic activities occur	Complete	Will review if Government policy changes	Delivered
4	Levels of Evidence required to identify, designate and manage MCZs	In progress	Will review if Government policy changes	30 September 2010
5	Sensitivity of habitats and species to marine pressures and activities(activities / features combined tool)	Draft delivered	Additional evidence being secured to underpin detail in tool	Working draft: Delivered Final: 30 October
6	Developing Conservation Objectives for MCZs Guidance	Draft delivered	Finalisation of Guidance	8 October 2010